

Did You Know?

...that there is a disease that strikes 2,000-3,000 Americans each year, that can cause death in a previously healthy person within hours and that can leave those who survive with deafness, amputated limbs or mental retardation? That disease is **Meningococcal meningitis**. “Meningococcal” refers to the name of the family of bacteria that cause this disease. Meningitis refers to the swelling of the meninges, or the surroundings of the brain and spinal cord.

Doctors can treat meningococcal meningitis with antibiotics, but because it can become lethal so quickly and people often do not seek medical care immediately, the antibiotics often cannot work fast enough to prevent death or life-long disability. Unfortunately, the bacteria can spread easily from person to person through coughing or sneezing or by direct contact such as when sharing water bottles or utensils. But now there is new a vaccine (“MCV4”) that can prevent meningococcal disease. This new vaccine is not for babies – it’s for teens. The CDC recommends that 11-12 year olds and high school freshmen receive the “MCV4” shot when they get their annual health physical. Many colleges now require this vaccine for all entering freshmen who will be living in dormitories. Adolescents of any age who want to avoid this disease can get this shot from their healthcare provider.

When was the last time you got a cold? You probably felt bad for a few days, and then it went away. Recently, an increasing number of teens have thought they had a cold, but after a week, instead of getting better they started having bad coughing spells (as many as 15 in a day) with choking, gasping, high pitched “whoops,” and sometimes throwing up. They have pertussis or “whooping” cough, a highly contagious (easily spread) disease of the lungs. In 2004, 20,000 cases of pertussis were reported in the U.S., the highest number reported in over 40 years. Of these cases, nearly **40% were among adolescents 10 to 19 years old**. Teens who get whooping cough miss an average of a week of school and feel rotten for a long time. There is a way to prevent pertussis. Did you know that every ten years, starting at about 11-12 years of age, you’re supposed to get a booster shot for tetanus and diphtheria (the Td shot)? Until recently, this booster shot did not include the vaccine for pertussis. However, with a new safer vaccine and given the sharp increase in disease, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now recommends that adolescents receive the “Tdap” vaccine, which protects from pertussis in addition to tetanus and diphtheria. Have you had a Tdap vaccination since you were 10 years old? If not, talk to your parents and your health care provider about whether you need to get one. A one-second sting could save weeks or months of misery.

At the same time an adolescent receives the MCV4 and Tdap vaccines, a review of his/her vaccine history should be done. Both females and males need to evaluate their entire vaccine history and complete primary series of vaccines usually given at a younger age if not completed. Females who have not received the human papillomavirus vaccine should consider getting it. And, in 2008-2009, for the first time, it is recommended that all persons 6 months to 18 years of age have influenza vaccine.

Source: **Give It A Shot** © American School Health Association, 2008